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ABSTRACT

The origins of the Herbartian Movement began with the writings of Johan Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), a German philosopher and educator. He believed that, through instruction, the mind and morals of the child could be molded. For this purpose, ideas are available from two sources: experience, which furnishes knowledge of nature, and social contact, which provides an awareness of one's fellow man. These two sources of ideas from the two major branches of the curriculum: the scientific and historical. Ultimately for Herbart, education should have two bases: ethics and psychology. The first determines the ends of education--that being a morally upright individual, while the second determines the means or methods of instruction. This paper examines the theories of Herbart, and traces the history of Herbartianism from its impact on German thought through its translation to America and the influence it had with the thought and practices of early American educators. This was the most comprehensive theory of education available to American educators up to the advent of John Dewey's pragmatism. It is concluded that while Herbartian theory is really just a series of deductions derived from a few ethically motivated central ideas, it provided one of the original foundations for whatever bond exists between scientific theory and educational practices today. (JD)

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DID THE AMERICAN HERBARTIANS HAVE A RESEARCH BASE?

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> Just as into a test tube of cloudy liquid a chemist may pour a clarifying solution, so the introduction of Herbartianism clarified American pedagogy. Herbartians isolated the problems and gave a systematic outline under which the discussions might be carried on. To the problems with which American educators were concerned, Herbart offered a solution in a systematic form under such heads as, . . . apperception, interest, concentration, culture epochs, and formal steps.[1]

So writes one George Basil Randels in his 1911 dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania.

The origins of the Herbartian Movement begin, of course, with the early writings and activities of Johan Friedrich Herbart. Since the time of Comenius, educators have searched for ways of adapting instruction to the psychological nature of the child. Possibly their efforts first failed because of the absence of a more adequate and systematic psychology of learning. John Locke had presented one system -- that of formal discipline, and Rousseau yet another in his writings. But neither they nor Pestalozzi, writing in the late eighteenth century, went far enough in identifying the psychological foundations upon which their ideas were based. Here is the precise point of departure for the contributions of Johan Friedrich Herbart. For, in addition to voluminous writings on metaphysics and ethics, Herbart posited a distinct psychology on which a "science" of education could ideally be based.

Herbart's first published work came in 1802 with an analysis of the methods of Pestalozzi. Here Herbart professed a dissatisfaction with the disorganization of Pestalozzi's pedagogical theory, as well as his general lack of scientific precision. In 1799, Herbart had visited Pestalozzi's school at

Burgdorf, and it was during this time that he arrived at the conclusion that educational methodology could be made into a systematic science if it were given a proper ethical basis. He concluded this after years of working as a tutor where he was required to make written reports to the parents of his charges. In the reports, he made a point of noting the needs and strengths of each child, and then modifying his teaching methods and curriculum for each child accordingly.

Herbart also opened a pedogogical seminary at Gottingen to develop and test his educational theories.[2] And in 1809, he succeeded Immanual Kant as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Konigsberg. He remained there until 1833. During these twenty-four years, most of his major works were published.[3]

Education was of tremendous importance for Herbart because he believed, through instruction, the mind and morals of the child could be molded. For this purpose, ideas are available from two sources: experience, which furnishes knowledge of nature, and social contact, which provides an awareness of one's fellow man. These two sources of ideas, then, form the two major branches of the curriculum, the scientific and historical.[4] Ultimately for Herbart, education should have two bases: ethics and psychology. The first determines the ends of education -- that being a morally upright individual, while the second determines the means or methods of instruction.[5]

THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN HERBARTIANISM

There had been more than fifty years of pedagogical contact with Germany by the 1890's. Under German influence, Americans had

reorganized a school system, borrowed the kindergarten, and revised the elementary schools. It is, therefore, obvious that interest in German education at least partially explains the American response to German Herbartianism, specifically by being linked through the works and influence of the German Herbartians, Karl Volkmar Stoy, Tuiskon Ziller, Wilhelm Rein, and others in the mid-nineteenth century.[6]

Herbart's educational ideas were not looked on with favor by most German normal schools at first. It was not until 1865 that the Herbartian theories began to become popular in Germany, primarily because of the collective work of at least a dozen prominent German Herbartians who served as a transitional group between Herbart and the American Herbartians of the 1890's. However, Wilhelm Rein holds the unique position of serving as the most important and direct link between the German and American branches. Harold Dunkel even goes so far as to declare that Rein is the man who did most to make the Herbartian Movement famous by teaching those Americans who were most influential in popularizing the ideas in the United States, so that in "America particularly, Herbartianism is Reinism."[7]

One of Rein's American students, Charles DeGarmo, tells us how Rein continued Herbart's empiricism of using practical demonstrations to attempt proofs of various theories:

> Dr. Rein made the pedagogical seminary at Jena the most noted of its kind in Europe. His specific contribution to the Herbartian cause lies not so much in the promulgation of new ideas, as in the practical application of the important ones that had remained mostly untried. Ziller's opponents were inclined to regard him as a pedagogical sentimentalist. Few teachers thought that his plan of concentration, with its scheme of culture epochs could stand the test of actual practice. It was the unrivaled work of Rein . . . that showed

how Ziller's plan for selection and concentration of studies could be applied to the eight separate grades of the elementary school.[8]

Pre-Herbartian methods of instruction employed in late nineteenth century America stressed mental discipline. However, the methods taught in the normal schools were largely influenced by Pestalozzi and Froebel. But new leaders of educational thought, such as Parker and Dewey, realized that these methods lacked depth. Other critics pointed out that the doctrines of Pestalozzi and Froebel had no "scientific method" for a base.[9] At the same time, American education was dominated by English writers, such as Joseph Payne, of whom it was said as late as 1880 that he had influenced American pedagogy more than any other writer.[10] Also, Alexander Bain's Science of Education was accepted as the standard in defining the true nature of learning and teaching. This type of English pedagogy, based on mental discipline and faculty psychology dating to the days of Locke, was expressed succinctly in a popular American textbook of the time: "Discipline of the mind . . . is the great thing in intellectual training."[11]

Hegelianism, as a minor predecessor of Herbartianism in America, was popularized by men such as William Torrey Harris. His translation of Johann Rosenkranz' Hegelian Philosophy of Education was commonly used in state normal schools.[12] But Hegel's philosophy was generally unpopular due to its rather abstract conceptual base, as well as its lack of practical transferability to the common school classroom. At the same time, the "Child Study Movement," dominated by G. Stanley Hall, had the same shortcoming of being too abstract as did Hegelianism. The study of the child

had no practical underpinnings to a curriculum for teachers.[13] Finally, by 1890, the kindergarten had been introduced, accompanied by a horde of Froebelian zealots. Therefore, two things were happening as the century came to a close. First, the American mind was now becoming predisposed by all of the German theories to accept Herbart with certain modifications.[14] Secondly, there was also a need for a pedagogy that was scientific, yet simple and practical. Herbartianism was the first effort to fill this need.

In 1883, Charles DeGarmo left the faculty of Illinois State Normal School to study pedagogy in Germany. As his motive, he said that he hoped to return to help lift American Normal Schools to a higher efficiency.[15] There were already a few Americans studying at the University of Jena about the new theories of Herbart. By 1890, the total number having done so was estimated at nine, although by 1900, the number "approached fifty."[16] Charles and his brother, Frank McMurry, were the first American members of Wilhelm Rein's new Herbartian seminar which opened there in 1885, although DeGarmo had been exposed to Herbartian theories at Jena before Rein arrived.

The American Herbartian Movement was largely the creation of three men: Charles DeGarmo, Charles McMurry, and Frank McMurry.[17] And though the movement was supported by others to varying degrees, "any account of American Herbartianism must focus primarily on these three, for they were both its theoretical proponents and its practical agitators."[18]

Charles DeGarmo returned to America in 1886 to accept the Chair of Reading and Modern Languages at Illinois State Normal

School.[19] He began to publish articles on Herbartianism almost immediately, including translations. His first series of articles was published in the Illinois School Journal entitled, "Glimpses at German Pedagogy."[20] He then published a second series of articles in the Educational Review entitled, "The Herbartian System of Pedagogics."[21] In these most important introductory articles, DeGarmo presented what was probably the most detailed American exposition of Herbart's theories.

Charles McMurry returned from Germany in 1888 to accept a position at Winona Normal in Minnesota. In 1892, he returned to Illinois State Normal where he had taught prior to going abroad. Now he replaced his brother Frank as principal of the practice school. He remained at Illinois State until 1899, through the peak years of the American Herbartian Movement. During these years, in addition to many curricular projects along Herbartian lines, he published works that have been called "outstanding in their influence on American education."[22] His books contained a simple, practical statement of Herbartian pedagogy. Unlike other major works written for the scholarly side of the profession, these books "were used as texts in teacher-training institutions, especially normal schools, and "exerted a wider influence on classroom procedure than any other works of the period."[23]

While studying in Wilhelm Rein's Herbartian Seminar, Frank McMurry reported that he underwent a distinct "educational conversion."[24] When he returned to America in 1889, Frank McMurry served brief tenures respectively as principal of an elementary school in Chicago, a professor and principal of the

practice school at Illinois State Normal, and as a member of the education faculty at the University of Illinois. In 1892, he accepted the position of Director of the Franklin School of Pedagogy at the University of Buffalo. By the end of the decade, however, he had taken his last position as Professor of Elementary Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.[25]

THE HERBARTIAN YEARS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

The decade of the 1890's was very significant to the history of American education. By this time, education was becoming recognized by American universities as an important discipline worthy of serious scientific study. But more important than this, for the first time, there occurred for the classroom teacher an awareness that science was useful in solving their problems as well.

From 1888 to 1890, during the winter evenings, "classes in philosophy" were held at the home of Professor George Brown of Illinois State Normal.[26] Out of these first informal meetings, one of the first of the larger organizations devoted to the discussion of Herbartian ideas was founded. This was the Illinois Schoolmaster's Club. This group met twice a year during the early 1890's and was the direct predecessor of the Herbart Club.[27]

The Herbart Club was organized at the annual meeting of the National Education Association of Saratoga, New York in 1892. It consisted largely of "teachers who have made a special study of Herbartian principles of education."[28] The purpose of the club was to encourage the spread of these ideas and to promote their application in American schools, most important of which was the concept that teaching should be based on scientific grounds.

In 1890, Charles McMurry had written How to Conduct the Recitation, and in 1891, he had published A Geography Plan for the Grades and Pioneer History Stories. Also, in 1892, McMurry published Elements of General Method in which Herbart's pedagogy was adapted to American classroom use for the first time. These works helped to lay the foundation for the future national Herbartian organization, as well as other Herbartian literature, and gave the movement the rudiments of an ideological base indigenous to American schools.[29]

After 1892, the movement spread rapidly. At the end of the first year, there were 700 members, at first centered in mid-western normal schools but later spread across the nation. Notices of the organization of new local clubs were received weekly.[30] In the National Herbart Society's first yearbook, a beginning was made toward further adapting Herbartian principles to America's schools. The organization authorized Charles DeGarmo to translate two German Herbartian works. Also, a course of lessons was included by Frank McMurry, illustrating Herbart's theory of curricular concentration. In referring to DeGarmo's translations, Nicholas Murray Butler stated that with these works, "the American teacher can begin the study of education scientifically and to some purpose."[31] Herbartian literature increased in volume as the decade progressed, including the translation in 1896 of Herbart's The A.B.C. of Sense Perception and The Outline of Educational Doctrine.[32]

The regional organization centered at Normal, Illinois, quickly attracted nationwide attention. By 1894, there had developed in

the pedagogical world a gradual awareness of differences between the Herbartians as representative of the more radical faction within the National Education Association, and the more conservative Committee of Fifteen, dominated by the Hegelian, William Torrey Harris, and appointed by the NEA to report on the status of classroom teaching methodology at the next annual meeting to be held in 1895. The confrontation which ensued between these two groups was significant in that it not only marked the transition of the Herbart Club from a regional, midwestern group to a national organization, but also because it provided the new organization with the spirit and intellectual fervor it needed to move on to the national scene.

Although a moderate supporter of education reform, as a Hegelian, William Torrey Harris was not convinced of the merits of Herbartianism as a solution to educational problems. Edward A. Krug says that Harris as well as the Herbartians, however, were considered equally heretical by the "formal discipline" or conservative faction. The emerging differences between Harris for the moderates and the Herbartians, or the radicals, nevertheless, centered on the meaning and application of the term "correlation of studies."[33] The conflict was specifically centered on the report of one of the three subcommittees devoted to the topic: "Correlation of Studies in Elementary Education," which Harris chaired as well.[34]

The presentation of the report was scheduled for the February 20, 1895 session in Cleveland. As the date approached, word spread that the Herbartians would be there in force to take on the king of

NEA platform warfare, Harris.[35] When Harris' report was presented, four interpretations of correlation were stated, none of which agreed with the Herbartian definition of the concept. The Herbartians rose to the challenge with Frank McMurry leading the charge. Others, including brother Charles, Francis W. Parker, DeGarmo, and Nicholas Murray Butler, joined the attack. The collective challenge proved a severe blow to Harris, whose report was dismissed as "an elaborate defense of the status quo."[36]

After the Cleveland confrontation, Herbartian ideas were regarded as being on the cutting edge of educational theory. Nicholas Murray Butler hailed the 1895 meeting as a milestone for Herbartianism, calling the confrontation "the beginning of the influence of the Herbartian philosophy upon our theory and practice."[37]

From the very beginning, however, the membership of the organization was not limited to the disciples of Herbart. For example, in the very first yearbook, edited in 1895 by Charles McMurry, we find John Dewey writing a rather scathing article attacking Herbartian doctrines:

> Herbartianism seems to me essentially a schoolmaster's psychology, not the psychology of a child. It is the natural expression of a nation laying great emphasis upon authority and upon the formation of individual character in distinct and recognized subordination to the ethical demands made . . . by that authority. It is not the psychology of a nation which professes to believe that every individual has within him the principle of authority, and that order means coordination, not subordination.[38]

In a very short time, the membership was nearly one thousand strong and included practically every educator of note in the country. This unprecedented growth was reached in only the first

year of the national organization's existence. This could be explained by the Herbartian belief in toleration of all views, limited only by a scientific mind set.[39] In his 1911 assessment of Herbartianism, Randels agreed that non-Herbartians were members who fully debated questions being discussed, although during the first three years, the topics for discussion at the annual meetings were purely Herbartian in content.[40]

As early as 1897, Charles DeGarmo had foreseen the need for a change in the structure and purposes of the Herbart Society. F. G. Blair reports that in that year, DeGarmo approached him to rewrite the constitution of the Herbart Society and to come up with a new name as well.[41] Blair suggested the name, "The National Society for the Scientific Study of Education." He points out also that DeGarmo realized "that the Herbartian brand or pedagogics needed to be absorbed and merged into a growing national concept of education."[42]

The transition from the Herbart Club of 1892 evolved through several name changes including intermediate names such as "The National Herbart Society," in 1895, and "The Herbart Society for the Scientific Study of Education." The transition from The National Herbart Society to the National Society for the Study of Education covers a period from the last meeting of the old society in 1899 to the first meeting of the new organization in 1902. This three-year period also parallels the beginning of the decline in influence of Herbartian pedagogy as the prevailing educational philosophy in America. In 1901, the Society dropped the word "Herbart" from its name and changed it for a time to "The National

Society for the Scientific Study of Education," as Blair had suggested. In 1901, a call was made to the members of the Herbart Society in conjunction with the Child Study Association and plans were developed for a new organization in which the name "Herbart" would not appear. It was announced, however, that the new society would carry on its investigation in the "scientific spirit of Herbart."[43]

The new organization, mainly a blend of Herbartians and "child study" advocates, started in 1902 by issuing its first yearbook. For the first year only, the yearbook for the new broadened organization was edited by Charles McMurry. But the presidency of the executive committee no longer was DeGarmo's as it had been in the older society, but went instead to Nicholas Murray Butler. DeGarmo, however, still served on the six-man Executive Committee along with Charles McMurry. Although there were occasional contributions in the first three yearbooks by Frank McMurry and DeGarmo, after 1905, contributions of the original American Herbartians became rare. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Herbartianism as an identifiable movement had virtually disappeared.[44]

A BRIEF THEORETICAL ASSESSMENT

Herbart and his particular brand of educational philosophy/psychology served much the same function for modern educational theory as did the theories of Sigmund Freud for modern psychoanalytic theory. Both provided early, unified systems based on quasi-scientific research and observation. If both systems have not weathered well as time has passed, they are still significant

as "firsts" in their respective fields. Although the move toward an objective "science" of education can be traced back at least to the early "sense realists," such as Comenius, it was Herbart and his European and American disciples who first succeeded in presenting a full-blown pedagogical system complete with contributing theories.

The greatest defect in Herbart's thinking as judged from a late twentieth century perspective was his failure to realize that the child is an active, living organism, interacting with its environment. As implied by Dewey's assessment included earlier, Herbart regarded education as a formation from without and believed that the building of the mind is a purely mechanical process merely of association rather than the achievement of intrinsic meaning through purposive activity.

Herbartianism, however, was the most comprehensive theory of education available to American educators up to the advent of Dewey's pragmatism. The most important aim of Herbartianism was the belief that the highest purpose of education was the development of "ethical character."[45] The exact meaning of this concept was never agreed upon. Charles Brauner says this was because by building in maximum ambiguity of meaning, "the Herbartians could claim widespread consensus, since anyone could supply his own interpretation of "ethical character."[46] This was certainly a major factor in the movement's quick fade from dominance of American educational theory as well.

One of the most obvious reasons, also, was the competition of the Child Study Movement with its distinctly Rousseauean

colorings. It produced research which, although at first no more grounded in firm objective methodology, nevertheless, questioned many of the original Herbartian assumptions.[47] Similarly, while John Dewey's pragmatism grew in popularity as the century turned, it flatly contradicted such Herbartian theories as the doctrine of interest. This was considered the kernel of Herbartianism. This central concept held that by arousing interest in the learner, the teacher could influence conduct; or, the kind of character one has is dependent upon the sort of interests provided in the educative process.[48] Finally, during the early twentieth century, anthropologists were developing a concept of culture which thoroughly demolished the Herbartian cultural epochs theory--the idea that there are well delineated periods in the history of man which correspond to the various stages the individual passes through on the way to maturation.[49]

On the positive side, the Herbartians recognized that the school should play a major role in bringing about social change. This concept was later expanded upon by twentieth century Progressives and Reconstructionists. Secondly, there is a striking similarity between the Herbartian doctrines of apperception and concentration[50] on the one hand, and the early twentieth century Gestalt field theories which stressed a "molar" instead of a "molecular" view of the learning process. The Herbartian doctrine of apperception gave rise to new theories of association which only partially accepted the original Herbartian attitude. But these central doctrines provided the first fully-developed theory of associationism in American educational history. Finally, where

would the ubiquitous Madalyn Hunter and her curriculum and methods colleagues be today without the foundation provided by the Herbartian Five Formal Steps of Instruction? Herbartianism placed major emphasis for the first time on the necessity for the teacher to become technically competent by the skillful use of careful classroom planning and systematic teaching methodology. The modern-day lesson plan largely draws its origins from the Herbartians and their "five steps" for effective instruction.

CONCLUSION

Herbartian theory has been described as "an elegant geometric proof."[51] This is because, in the final analysis, it was really just a series of deductions derived from a few ethically motivated central ideas. And yet, at the same time, it was a comprehensive theory with all the trappings of scholarship. Morever, because of the zeal of its members, it took on the character, at times, of a somewhat irrational, emotional, even evangelical movement that attracted followers through a kind of conversion experience similar to the one Frank McMurry described that he underwent studying under Wilhelm Rein.[52]

Probably the most seriously limiting factor on the staying power of Herbartianism in America, however, was essentially its normal school colorings. As such, it was never really accepted by the university community as a serious philosophy/psychology at a time when "normal school" implied second-rate scholarship and thinking. By 1905, the movement had lost most of its original fervor and had assimilated itself into the fiber of American education in several ways, as "traces of it would continue to

reappear for at least another generation of teachers and teachers of teachers."[53]

The 1890's were very significant to the history of American education. Due largely to the organizational efforts of the Herbartians, education became recognized as a distinct discipline worthy of serious scientific investigation. This single contribution of the Herbartians cannot be understated. "Modified by new patterns of thought," writes S. Alexander Rippa, "Herbartianism might well mark the beginning of the scientific study of education in the United States."[54] More important than this, for the first time there occurred an awareness on the part of classroom teachers that science was at work for them. Common public school teachers were provided with a new set of ideals and practices which, for the first time, dignified and professionalized their work.

It remains to attempt an answer to the question posed by the title of this paper: Did the American Herbartians have a research base? The query can perhaps best be laid to rest by observing that the movement had a dual legacy which corresponded to the two halves of Herbart's original theoretical foundation: the ethical and psychological. The psychological legacy of utilizing empirical observation as a basis for theoretical constructs was largely positive and provided one of the original foundations for whatever bond exists between scientific theory and educational practice today. In this context, the Herbartian Movement was at least as "research based" as Dewey's pragmatism. Conversely, however, the ethical legacy was based on very unscientifically derived theories

which originated in Herbart's own moral standards. These standards later became vague when translated into American contexts some seventy to eighty years later and a hemisphere away. Herbart had believed that educational methodology could be made to fit scientific truth if it were first provided with a proper philosophical basis. Here, specifically, is the rub! America, in the immigrant laden 1890's, could no more come to a consensus as to what this "proper" basis should be any more than it can today. As a consequence, this second legacy led to the movement's early demise and generally diminished the force of many of its psychological theories derived therefrom.

Herbart's original theories were hatched at a time when Western Europe was still dominated by the Enlightenment. The hallmark of this intellectual era was a belief that through the dispassionate application of science, as Newton had shown in giving birth to the various laws of physics and astronomy, the world could indeed achieve perfectability. At the time, therefore, it was not a naive supposition held by Herbart and others, that by the discovery of a "science of education," man could also relieve the confusion connected with the teaching of little children in America's classrooms.

It is appropriate, then, to simply conclude by agreeing with F. W. Parker, writing about Herbartianism in 1895, in the first yearbook of the National Herbart Society, that up to that point in time: "No subject was ever brought into American schools that furnished so much food for thought."[55]

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50. Of all the Herbartian principles, the doctrine of apperception was the one most readily accepted by educators in general. This was the notion of acquiring new ideas by the aid of old ideas already in the mind. American psychologists had taught much the same thing under the terms "assimilation" and "association." The doctrine of concentration (or correlation) spoke to the congested nature of the school

curriculum at the time. Complaints about the multiplicity of subjects encouraged any principle which promised relief by concentrating the school studies and by making the curriculum less unwieldy. The Herbartian advocated a curriculum centered around the study of history and literature. Other subjects such as geography were used as "connectors" between the central subjects, while arithmetic and grammar were considered incidental by the Herbartians.

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